

CASE STUDY

A tale of two cyclists⁷⁹

Greg LeMond

Against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower, Laurent Fignon, a French road bicycle racer, began the grandest pursuit in the Tour de France, the final stage. 'The Professor,' as Fignon was called, would be defending the coveted yellow jersey from his major challenger, an American cyclist. However, it was already assumed due to the dramatic time difference between the leader and challenger that Fignon would have an easy victory. In fact, French newspapers had already begun preparing the following day's paper with Fignon's victory covering the front page.⁸⁰

The American, who had been in this spot before and who had come out victorious, was using the newest science to help him perform better than the other cyclists, including Fignon. However, at the beginning of this race, he was assuredly not considered a favorite and some suggested that the best he could hope for was to make it into the top-twenty. Nevertheless, after 2,000 miles, it was clear that the race would come down to a photo finish. What made this so extraordinary was the hardship that the American cyclist had to overcome to just be in the race. Many people considered him a hero just for coming back from the adversity he faced over the past two years, but here he was about to win another Tour de France. The American cyclist, Greg LeMond, would go on to win the 1989 Tour de France and beat Fignon by only eight seconds.

Five years earlier, in 1984, LeMond was in his first Tour de France and finished third in support of the team leader, who happened to be no other than 'The Professor,' Laurent Fignon.⁸¹ In 1985, LeMond switched teams and was asked to humbly support team captain Bernard Hinault win his fifth Tour de France. After playing his role as 'dutiful lieutenant,' LeMond finished second. However, due to his service, Hinault promised to repay LeMond by helping him win the following year.⁸²

In 1986, Greg LeMond would go on to win his first Tour de France becoming the first American to achieve the distinction. Though, it did not come without its fair share of controversy. Bernard Hinault, who had promised to support LeMond a year earlier, decided he was interested in winning again and competed with LeMond throughout the entire race. When a reporter asked Hinault the reason he consistently attacked his teammate, LeMond, he replied, 'Because I felt like it . . . If he doesn't buckle, that means he's a champion and deserves to win the race. I did it for his own good.'⁸³

Then in 1987, LeMond would have to overcome several life-altering adverse experiences. First, he fell off a bike and fractured his left wrist. Then, while recovering from the injury in the United States, he was out hunting and was accidentally shot by his brother-in-law. LeMond almost died, entering the hospital with 10–30 pellets inside of him and losing 65 percent of his blood volume.⁸⁴ When returning for surgery a few months later to address obstruction due to adhesions, he asked the doctor also to take out his appendix so he could use that as the excuse for the operation. Without this excuse, some would have raised

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instead of gloating, he used his international reputation to put pressure on cycling to reform.

How does each cyclist measure up in terms of humility? LeMond chose to see himself, his colleagues, and the world of professional cycling from a proper perspective. Understanding Armstrong's relationship with Dr. Michele Ferrari, LeMond knew the long-term impact this would have on the sport of cycling. The decisions made by LeMond placed the sport and others ahead of his own well-being. On the other hand, Armstrong's response to the investigation was anything but humble, from the first accusation to the USADA's eventual ruling, Armstrong only focused on himself. One example of this is on November 10, 2012, Lance tweeted 'Back in Austin and just layin' around. . .'¹⁰⁶ A picture embedded in the tweet featured Armstrong in his home laying on a couch below a wall featuring his seven Tour de France jerseys, despite the fact that all of his titles had recently been stripped at the conclusion of the USADA investigation.¹⁰⁷